

# North Layton Junior High School 1100 West 2000 North Layton, Utah 84041

October 10-11, 2006



Utah State Office of Education 250 East 500 South P.O. Box 144200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

# THE REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM REVIEWING

# North Layton Junior High School

1100 West 2000 North Layton, Utah 84041

October 10-11, 2006

## **UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

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State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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#### **FOREWORD**

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, October 10-11, 2006, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of North Layton Junior High School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal David Turner is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at North Layton Junior High School, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at North Layton Junior High School.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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# NORTH LAYTON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

# ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

# **School Administration**

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Counseling				
Lynette Nielsen				
Support Staff				
Jackie Crandall				
<b>Faculty</b>				
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Allison Anderson
Katherene Bassett
Rebecca Bibler
Penelope Hammonds
Rilla Hansen
Jennifer Jorgenson
Anne Nelson
Becki Wood

## NORTH LAYTON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of North Layton Junior High is to provide students with the opportunity to progress academically and socially.

## **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

- 1. A student learns essential skills and knowledge when actively involved in the process.
- 2. Each student is a valued individual with unique needs and abilities.
- 3. A student learns best in a safe and comfortable environment.
- 4. A student's self-esteem is enhanced by positive relationships and mutual respect.
- 5. A student's progress is the responsibility of the student, staff, parents, and the community.

## MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Ben Lems, Mount Jordan Middle School, Jordan School District, Visiting Team Chairperson

Chad Marriott, Orion Junior High School, Weber School District

Laura Pace, Valley Junior High School, Granite School District

Michelle Kersey, Roy High School, Weber School District

Tammy Haws, Orion Junior High School, Weber School District

#### VISITING TEAM REPORT

## NORTH LAYTON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

**CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE** 

North Layton Junior High School first opened in 1969, serving students from Layton City and Hill Air Force Base. The school is located in a predominantly business district next to a major freeway. North Layton Junior High School serves a very socially, economic, and culturally diverse population. The school population reached its peak in 2002 with 1,282 students. Davis School District opened a new junior high school the following year and enrollment dropped to 1,082. The population has remained fairly stable since.

The faculty and staff of North Layton Junior High School are committed to a "middle level" philosophy. They have implemented instructional teaming and common planning time. They also adopted school uniforms six years ago, which has helped transform the school into a more positive educational environment. In addition, the school has implemented a variety of remedial and advanced programs, peer and teacher support initiatives, and extracurricular activities that support its mission to provide students with the opportunity to progress academically and socially.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

Behavior has improved dramatically in the past four years, as indicated by the reported number of school discipline violations. Violations dropped from 3,105 in 2002 to 682 in 2004 and 733 in 2005.

The demographics of the school have changed over the past few years. The school has seen an increase in the number of limited English proficient students, especially Spanish-speaking students. The school has done an admirable job of addressing the needs of these students by implementing programs such as a class for Spanish speakers, PLT, after-school tutoring, remediation, Longhorn Leadership Teams, and various recognition programs.

Teachers use a variety of instructional methods and offer a variety of activities for students to demonstrate learning.

b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

North Layton Junior High School has been involved in its self-study for the past five years. It has been a challenge to maintain community involvement in the focus groups and other self-study committees. Several focus groups expressed frustration with maintaining parent and student involvement in the process from

year to year, and as a result did not actively seek their participation. The Visiting Team recommends that the school consider ways to sustain community involvement throughout the process.

A survey of teachers, students, and parents was taken in 2003 and again in 2006. The survey in 2003 involved 808 students and 561 parents. The same survey in 2006 only involved 102 students and 98 parents. A larger student and parent survey sample would more accurately reflect the opinions of these groups, reduce the likelihood that scores may be skewed, and make comparisons between the two surveys more valid.

## **Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that the school examine student success, participation, and trends in grades 10-12 as an indicator of how well students mastered basic core concepts while at North Layton Junior High School.
- Vertical networking and collaboration with feeder elementary schools and the high school would ensure that all core concepts are being addressed.

## **CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS**

a) To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?

Although the school leadership team felt they had given the community opportunities for input in the self-study process, interviews with students and parents revealed little evidence that they had any real significant involvement. The school made a good attempt at involving the community at the outset of their self-study process five years ago, but has struggled to maintain community involvement over the years. Attempts have been made through announcements, newsletters, and other means to keep the school community informed of the progress being made in the self-study process.

Everyone interviewed by the Visiting Team agreed that major improvements in school climate and student achievement have been made in the past couple of years, but could not articulate exactly what the school has done or is doing to make those improvements. The self-study appears to be primarily a product of the faculty and staff.

b) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?

The faculty and staff of North Layton Junior High School have done a good job of identifying the school's current strengths and weaknesses.

# CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

North Layton Junior High School's desired results for student learning are as follows:

- 1. Learning to Learn
  - Students will use a variety of learning strategies, personal skills, and management skills to achieve learning.
  - Students will reflect and evaluate learning for the purpose of improvement.
  - Students will produce quality work.
  - Students will be accountable for their own learning.
- 2. Essential Skills and Knowledge
  - Students will demonstrate reading, writing, listening, integrating, and speaking skills in each content area.
  - Students will practice problem solving.
  - Students will use and access information using multimedia.
  - Students will use reasoning and critical thinking.
  - Students will expand and integrate content knowledge.
- 3. Career and Civic Preparation
  - Students will work with others in a variety of situations, including appropriate disagreement and conflict resolution skills.
  - Students will take responsibility for personal actions and act ethically.
  - Students will establish and achieve personal goals.
  - Students will work in groups.
  - Students will attend.

## **Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:**

a) To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?

There is evidence to suggest that a faculty committee was primarily responsible for developing the school mission statement. The committee members used as a basis the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) "School Belief Inventory"

completed by the faculty, staff and parents. The resulting mission statement stated how North Layton Junior High School would be a place of learning through specific beliefs that included quality instruction, the development of essential skills, students' future goals, and the involvement of community members. The committee presented its final mission statement recommendation to the faculty and petitioned all to respond with any recommended changes via e-mail. No suggestions were received in reply.

b) To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?

The school's belief statements address some of the key issues upon which North Layton Junior High School makes decisions and developments school policies. The majority of the belief statements relate to student learning. This supports the programs implemented toward student success in all areas of learning. A recommendation from the Visiting Team is to revisit each focus group to infuse the beliefs into all focus areas and to be committed to improving upon these areas.

c) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?

The desired results for student learning are in alignment with the mission statement and the beliefs of the school. The Visiting Team recommends that the staff and stakeholders revisit the DRSLs in order to increase levels of commitment to the DRSLs.

## **Curriculum Development:**

a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?

The Visiting Team noted that members of the staff of North Layton Junior High School work collaboratively in their respective departments to develop clearly defined standards that result in appropriate expectations for a wide variety of learners, and that the curriculum aligns with State Core requirements. North Layton Junior High School's success at implementing the Core Curriculum is evident through student performance on end-of-level testing.

The school has an early-out day for students each week. Staff members utilize this time to meet and collaborate with their academic or grade level teams. This enables curriculum planning and/or revision to be ongoing. North Layton Junior High School has also implemented teaming for seventh grade students in which their English, social studies, science, and math teachers frequently collaborate to

integrate these four academic areas with the goal of better serving all seventh grade students and addressing their different learning abilities.

b) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?

The Visiting Team encourages North Layton Junior High School to review its DRSLs and to continue collaborating in order to more explicitly establish connections between the curriculum, the DRSLs, and student learning.

## **Quality Instructional Design:**

a) To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?

School staff members were observed using a variety of teaching strategies to enhance student learning and engage students. These teaching strategies included direct instruction, lab work, computer simulations, PowerPoint presentations, cross-curricular projects, project-based activities, educational games, cooperative learning, hands-on (manipulative) activities, flashcards, and individual student learning.

The Visiting Team commends the school for its efforts to increase the variety of teaching strategies used by teachers and recommends that continued professional development be offered to support and increase the use of teaching strategies that engage the student.

b) To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?

In each class observed, teachers were using a variety of instructional strategies within the allotted block of instructional time. Most teachers used multiple strategies during the class period, varying the teaching strategies two or three times.

Teachers welcome the inclusion of special education students and English language learners in their classrooms. Peer tutors often accompany these students to classes in order to help and assist them. Teachers also differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of these students and others who may be struggling.

c) To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?

The school has implemented many support programs to help students in the learning process. These include remedial and honors programs, midterm reports, correspondence with parents of struggling students, summer programs, extracurricular and after-school activities, the Longhorn Case Management Team, a SOAR to Success reading program, team teaching, Saturday school, Longhorn Leadership Teams, tracking, and peer tutoring.

Both students and parents feel teachers work hard to offer extra help to students. Teachers are frequently available for students before and after school and accessible to parents by appointment, e-mail, or telephone. The Visiting Team commends the school for its work in meeting the needs of students and encourages the staff to continue to put the needs of students first and foremost.

## **Quality Assessment Systems:**

a) To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?

Expectations have been identified school-wide with the DRSLs. North Layton Junior High School has implemented school-wide assessment guidelines. With a shared vision for student learning, each department has identified its performance standards for evaluating the level of the quality of student's achievement. These assessment strategies are in place for each department within school guidelines, and departments are continually improving assessment strategies.

b) To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?

There is strong evidence supporting the notion that assessments are developed with focus on intended purpose and student performance. North Layton Junior High School has focused on expanding its assessment strategies, including the use of group work projects and assignments. Teachers at North Layton Junior High School are aware of the school's DRSLs and are implementing them into their assessments.

c) To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?

The Visiting Team found evidence that assessments are designed, collected, and used in a fair and equitable manner. North Layton Junior High School is a very diverse school and has become more diverse in the past couple of years. The Visiting Team commends the school for its efforts to continually find fair and equitable ways to assess the achievement of students from diverse backgrounds.

## **Leadership for School Improvement:**

a) To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?

The school leadership has established an academic learning climate in which teaching and learning are supported. A systematic and comprehensive assessment system is established for monitoring student progress and evaluating the effectiveness of instructional practices and organizational conditions. The assessment system includes a highly effective and efficient data collection process.

b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?

The administration has been actively engaged in collecting data and making datadriven decisions. For example, based on teacher referral data, the administration was concerned about the number of student behavior referrals and tardies. The administration presented an idea for improving student behavior to the Joint Staff Study Committee (JSSC). The committee approved the administration's ideas, which were then presented to the Community Council and the faculty. Upon approval, the administration implemented a new school-wide discipline policy that has effectively improved student behavior and reduced tardies within the school.

c) To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?

The leadership of North Layton Junior High School monitors progress in student achievement. Assessments have been implemented school-wide to inform staff members of the specific skills students have mastered or are struggling with. Using data, departments and teams have developed cross-curricular activities and lessons to help students make connections between different disciplines.

d) To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?

The leadership of North Layton Junior High School provides skillful stewardship of the school. Parents, students, and staff members repeatedly commended the leadership for improving the school's climate and culture. The school-wide discipline plan and the resource officer provide a feeling of safety in the school. Disruptions, tardiness, and inappropriate behavior in the halls have improved because of the physical presence of the administrators and the expectation the entire staff has for student behavior.

e) To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?

North Layton Junior High is in the initial stages of correlating the DRSLs with the Core Curriculum. It has established school goals and identified appropriate improvements. The Visiting Team recommends that the DRSLs be incorporated into each lesson plan to ensure that the school goals within the action plan will be achieved.

f) To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?

The leadership at North Layton Junior High School has consciously established school-wide structures, such as Parents Assisting Longhorns (PALs), to assist in everyday activities at school. The Community Council and Parent Teacher Association are actively engaged in the school. They are an integral part of the interface of the school. The school community shows a commitment to continuous school improvement.

The Visiting Team recognizes the positive and productive relationships that exist among students, teachers, support staff and administrators. There is strong evidence that the school has created and sustained a learning environment for students that nurtures a sense of caring and belonging.

# **Community Building:**

a) To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?

It is evident that North Layton Junior High School does a great job promoting community building. The administration and staff work closely with all stakeholders to develop quality programs and promote good communication between the school and the community. This is evident in the various programs the school has created both during the school day and after school.

The Visiting Team commends the administration and faculty for their excellent implementation of various methods of parent communication and in their continuing efforts to find ways of reaching those parents that they have had problems communicating with in the past.

b) To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?

Students receive a variety of learning experiences by participating in many community-oriented service projects.

## **Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:**

- a) To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?
  - The staff is actively involved in staff development based on the profile of the school and the National Study of School Evaluation. Staff development currently includes reading strategies, SOARS to Success, reading training, instructional strategies, SMARTS training, web design, and other topics. The staff members meet to collaborate at least once each month on school-wide issues, as well as holding monthly meetings with their departments.
- b) To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?

It was reported to the Visiting Team that the leadership of the school fully supports the faculty, and the faculty fully supports the leadership. There seems to be a strong desire to do what is best for students. North Layton Junior High School has incorporated several programs to be actively engaged in the students' learning process, as well as responsibility for each other and themselves. Parents are involved on a daily basis in working with the students through the PALS (Parents Assisting Longhorns) program. The staff may want to consider implementing some data-driven information to assist them in their school action plan. The staff should continue to look at formal and informal indicators to verify that teaching strategies assure student learning.

# CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

Most Utah public junior high/middle schools are not accredited through NAAS, but only by the USOE – it is their choice to join NAAS or not.

## CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

a) To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?

North Layton Junior High has considered a variety of data sources to determine the school's current action plan. Many of the action steps in the action plan have been in place for two or more years. The Visiting Team recommends that the school consider the effectiveness of these action steps and, if necessary, modify them or make them more specific to the critical needs of the school.

b) To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?

There appears to be a strong commitment to the action plan by most of the members of the staff. However, a few staff members were not as aware of the action plan as the majority, and thus not as committed. Many parents and students were also not committed to the action plan, due largely to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the plan. More should be done to involve and educate parents and students about the action plan and to ensure that all staff members are aware of and committed to achieving the goals of the plan. The Visiting Team recommends that the school expand ownership of the action plan through regular opportunities for stakeholders to collaborate and work together toward achieving the school-wide goals.

c) How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the school-wide action plan appear to be?

Most staff members have an understanding of what they need to do to accomplish the goals of the action plan. The Visiting Team recommends that the school include specific, measurable objectives and benchmarks in the action steps so that progress can be monitored. Additional professional development and increased involvement by parents and students will be critical in achieving the school's goals.

# CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

## **Commendations:**

• The Visiting Team commends the school leadership team for the sincere effort its members made to do a through analysis of the school's strengths and limitations.

- The administration is to be commended for its support of the staff; its positive professional relationship with students, parents, and the community; and willingness to share leadership of the school with the stakeholders.
- The Visiting Team commends the school for providing a positive, safe, and nurturing environment for students. Administrators, teachers, and other support staff members are perceived as being friendly, caring, and positive, and as taking a sincere interest in each student. Students like their teachers. They feel that their teachers are competent, have high expectations, and want them to succeed. Staff members are willing to make whatever accommodations are necessary to ensure success for every student.
- Staff members are very supportive of each other and work well together, as is evidenced by their collaborative efforts in teaming and cross-curricular activities. The Visiting Team commends the school for these efforts and encourages the school to continue to find ways to effectively collaborate within and across departments.
- The Visiting Team recognizes the positive impact programs such as PALs, Student Leadership Teams, student recognition programs, and the dress code have had on the school, and commends the school for its efforts to support programs that give students a voice and recognize them for outstanding achievement.

## **Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that the school revisit the action plan, evaluate the most critical needs in the areas of student achievement and communication, and focus its efforts on those needs, including identifying ways to assess progress through benchmarks and data analysis.
- The Visiting Team recommends that staff members and stakeholders revisit the DRSLs to increase levels of commitment among the staff and to identify measurable indicators as a foundation for formal assessments in order to monitor and measure student achievement of the DRSLs. The Visiting Team further recommends an increase in emphasis on making more explicit connections between the curriculum and the DRSLs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school continue to find innovative ways to involve all stakeholders in the self-study process and to sustain that involvement from year to year.